Women's Health UPDATE

Women Don't Have the Facts on Cervical Cancer

(NAPSA)—Cervical cancer is the only cancer that has a single-known cause—the human papilloma virus (HPV). This knowledge makes cervical cancer almost completely preventable.

But a new survey from the Association of Reproductive Health Professionals (ARHP) finds that women and their health care providers are not communicating about HPV and its links to cervical cancer, even though advanced screening tests are available that can detect the virus early and help prevent the disease.

"Time constraints and the fact that HPV is sexually transmitted make it difficult for doctors to communicate about HPV and its relationship with cervical cancer with their patients. That's why we're urging women to educate themselves," said Dr. Beth Jordan, medical director at ARHP.

The survey also reveals that while regular screening with the Pap test is widely administered, women have little sense of the preventative nature of cervical cancer. Furthermore, women 30 and older, those most at risk for cervical cancer, are least aware of HPV and its link to cervical cancer and are less apt to talk to their health care provider about the disease.

"Women who educate themselves about cervical cancer prevention can ask the right questions and make informed health care decisions," said. Dr. Jordan.

Cervical cancer strikes nearly 11,000 women in the United States each year and is second only to breast cancer in the number of women it affects worldwide.

Virtually all cases of cervical cancer are caused by high-risk forms of HPV, which affect approximately 80 percent of individuals at some point in their lives. In most cases, the virus is cleared naturally by the body's immune system. But in some women, high-risk types of HPV persist—staying dormant in the body months or even years before they become active—and can cause cell changes in the cervix that may ultimately become cancerous.

A new survey warns about a lack of communication between women and their doctors regarding HPV and its link to cervical cancer.

The Pap test can identify cells that have become abnormal due to HPV, and HPV testing detects the presence of the virus itself.

In addition, vaccines are in development and are designed to protect those who have not yet been exposed to the virus. However, screening will still be necessary, as the vaccines now being researched only target some of the several types of HPV that may trigger cervical cancer.

For more information about the HPV survey, visit www.arhp.org/HPVsurvey. To learn more about cervical cancer prevention, visit www.ahrp.org/cervicalcancer.org.